

State of New Mexico
Office of the Governor

Susana Martinez
Governor

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**ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS BUSTED IN NEW MEXICO DRIVER'S
LICENSE SCHEME**

SANTA FE – Governor Susana Martinez announced today that state and federal investigators have exposed yet another criminal enterprise that is using false residential documents to obtain New Mexico driver's licenses for illegal immigrants. Five illegal foreign nationals of East Indian descent were arrested Wednesday, including a suspected ring leader who is accused of charging \$6,000 per individual to obtain a New Mexico driver's license. This is the sixth incident in the last seven months involving criminal operators bringing out-of-state illegal immigrants to New Mexico for the sole purpose of obtaining a license. All but one of these suspects faces criminal charges in New Mexico for conspiracy, perjury, and the use of fraudulent documents. All suspects face federal immigration charges.

The arrests follow an intensive, ongoing investigation which was being conducted jointly by the Tax Fraud Investigations Division of the New Mexico Taxation and Revenue Department, the Investigations Bureau of the New Mexico State Police, and the United States Border Patrol. The Tax Fraud Investigations Division and State Police were planning arrests of all five individuals prior to being arrested by the Border Patrol at the Albuquerque Amtrak station. Tax Fraud Investigations Division agents had already stopped the licenses from being issued.

"It's clear that New Mexico has become a magnet for illegal immigrants far and wide who are seeking a driver's license so they can move freely from state to state," Governor Martinez said. "Given this latest incident, I continue to urge legislators in both chambers to quickly pass legislation that puts an end to the issuance of driver's licenses to illegal immigrants. This is not a matter of partisanship; it is a matter of public safety, and New Mexicans of all backgrounds are asking for the legislature to act."

Governor Martinez also pointed out that Washington, the only other state that issues full driver's licenses to illegal immigrants, is taking steps toward repealing that policy.

Democratic Governor Christine Gregoire recently voiced support for citizenship checks for driver's licenses, citing the need as "a matter of national security." Currently, several proposals in the Washington State Legislature would require the Department of Licensing to confirm an applicant's legal presence in the country. Gregoire has stated that she will sign such legislation if it reaches her desk.

"If New Mexico becomes the only state in the country to issue licenses to illegal immigrants, we will only become a larger haven for those who are seeking to break the law," Governor Martinez added.

Those arrested by the U. S. Border Patrol on Federal immigration charges in Wednesday's operation at the Albuquerque Amtrak station as they boarded a train bound for Chicago include ring leader Siraj A. "Sunny" Poonawala, 55, and his clients Sanjaykumar G. Patel, 24; Bhaveshkumar M. Prajapati, 27; Hiteshkumar A. Patel, 24; and Vipulkumar Patel, age unknown. Poonawala is also suspected of bringing other Indian nationals from New York, Alabama and Louisiana to New Mexico for the sole purpose of obtaining driver's licenses. He is accused of charging up to \$6,000 per each individual brought to New Mexico.

According to the investigation conducted by the New Mexico Taxation & Revenue Department's Tax Fraud Investigations Division, Poonawala made 26 appointments between Sept. 17, 2010 and Jan. 21, 2011 with appointment dates from Oct. 25, 2010 through April 20, 2011.

Poonawala is accused of taking his customers to an apartment complex in Albuquerque where he would temporarily lease an apartment in their names. He also would buy insurance in their names from a local insurance agent. The lease agreement and the insurance policy were then used as the two required residency documents when the individuals applied for their driver's licenses.

Taxation and Revenue Secretary-designate Demesia Padilla said the Motor Vehicle Division will revoke all licenses issued to identified clients of Poonawala.

"Clearly this law is being abused by individuals like Mr. Poonawala and his associates who have created a cottage industry of criminal enterprise," Padilla said. "We will go through each application we believe was generated by Mr. Poonawala and cancel those licenses."

The following cases were also investigated jointly by the Tax Fraud Investigations Division, New Mexico State Police and Immigrations and Customs Enforcement over the last seven months:

- In November 2010, three Chinese nationals - Shu Sheng Lui, 33, Hiew Fongyee, 31, and Lam Fong Siu, 44 - were arrested in Albuquerque after they attempted to acquire licenses with forged residency documents. They had paid 22-year-old Gordon Leong \$500 per person to obtain forged documents showing New Mexico

residence in order to obtain driver's licenses.

- In October 2010, State Police arrested two Chinese nationals accused of being part of an illegal driver's license scheme at an MVD office in Santa Fe. Shunxian Feng, 33, flew in from China for the sole purpose of getting a driver's license. Workers at MVD became suspicious after seeing Feng with Shu Juan Liu, whom workers had noticed at MVD several times. Shu Juan Liu fled, but Feng and Yue Xian Liu, 50, were arrested and charged with conspiracy and forging a fictitious license.
- In September 2010, State Police arrested Costa Rican national Adolfo J. Mora-Granados, 23, in Albuquerque for his suspected role in helping four illegal immigrants obtain driver's licenses. He is accused of using fake lease agreements to secure licenses. He was charged with four counts of conspiracy and six counts of forgery.
- In September 2010, State Police arrested Christian Sobral, a Brazilian man who tried to obtain licenses for two other Brazilians in Albuquerque. Sobral was paid \$3,000 to fly them into New Mexico. He was charged with two counts of conspiracy to commit a felony.
- In July 2010, a 32-year-old Illinois man was arrested after helping two undocumented Polish immigrants who live in Illinois get licenses in Albuquerque. Jaroslaw Kowalczyk, who pleaded guilty in federal court for transporting illegal immigrants, charged the immigrants \$1,000 each to drive them to New Mexico to obtain forged documents.

For further information regarding investigations by the Taxation and Revenue Department, please contact S.U. Mahesh at (505) 490-0976.

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